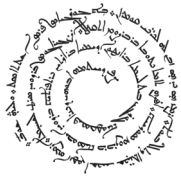
Jacob of Sarug's Homily on the Tower of Babel



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Fascicle 15

Jacob of Sarug's Homily on the Tower of Babel

Translated with Introduction by
Aaron Michael Butts

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INTRODUCTION

INFORMATION ON THIS HOMILY	
Homily Title:	On the Tower of Babel
Source of Text:	*Homiliae selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis* edited by Paul Bedjan (Paris-Leipzig 1905, 2nd ed. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2006), vol. 2, pp. 1–27 [Homily 33]
Lines:	550

OUTLINE

In his thirty-third *mimro*, Jacob of Sarug expounds upon the Old Testament story of the tower of Babel and the division of languages (Gen 11:1–9). The theme of this text, according to Jacob, is the rebellion (*moruduto*) of humanity and God's merciful response of discipline (*marduto*).[1] This *mimro*, which is written in dodecasyllabic meter, is replete with literary art and rhetorical features. Throughout the *mimro*, Jacob develops an extended word-play between *moruduto* 'rebellion' and *marduto* 'discipline',[2] as well as resumes the word-play between Babel and Syriac *balbel*, *bulbolo* 'confuse, confusion' that is found in the Peshitta (and similarly already in the Hebrew *Vorlage*). In this *mimro*, Jacob also makes dramatic use of direct discourse, a rhetorical feature found elsewhere in his writings. A particularly striking example of this occurs in lines 99–132 where Jacob expands upon the three first person plural jussive phrases of the biblical text ('let us …') by placing a long list of

[1] Jacob further develops this interpretation of Gen 11:1–9 in his fifty-eighth *mimro* (Bedjan 1902–1910: 2.670–689 [Syr.]; Kollamparampil 1997: 353–369 [Eng.]), in which he discusses the division of languages that occurred at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–13).

[2] It has not been possible to reflect this word-play in the following English translation, though an attempt has been made to render these terms consistently as 'rebellion' and 'discipline'.

additional hortatory statements into the mouths of the people of Babel.[3] Another rhetorical feature that is found throughout this *mimro* is the use of vocative phrases, especially 'O discerning ones', by which Jacob addresses the reader/audience.

Jacob's *mimro* 'On the Construction of the Tower of Babel' generally follows the order of the biblical text. Within this structure, Bedjan divided the *mimro* into thirteen sections, which have been adopted here.[4] The *mimro* begins in Section 1 (lines 1–44) with a rhetorical proem, in which Jacob declares his inadequacy for expressing his subject matter. His inadequacy is, however, counteracted by God's grace. This initial section also introduces the theme of God's mercy in the form of discipline (*marduto*), one of the two primary themes of the *mimro*. Section 2 (lines 45–74) introduces the other theme of the *mimro*, namely the rebellion (*moruduto*) of humanity. After mentioning several cases of human rebellion, Jacob turns to the particular instance at Babel. Section 3 (lines 75–132) begins by providing the Biblical background to the story of the tower of Babel. It, then, proceeds to the cause (*'ellto*) of the rebellion at Babel. Similar discussions of the causes of the rebellion occur elsewhere in the Syriac exegetical tradition, including in Ephrem, Narsai, and later commentators such as Bar 'Ebroyo in the West-Syriac tradition and the author of the Diyarbakir commentary, Išo'dad of Merv, and Bar Koni in the East-Syriac tradition.[5] According to Jacob, the first cause of the rebellion was fear that a flood would once again scatter humanity over the earth, as is suggested at the end of Gen 11:4.[6] This was not, however, the only cause of the rebellion since the people were also

[3] A similar, though abbreviated instance occurs in lines 246–256, but with God as the speaker.

[4] Bedjan 1902–1910. For discussion of the organizational structure of Jacob's *mimre*, see Blum 1983.

[5] For a detailed survey of the Syriac exegetical tradition with references to the major works, see Van Rompay 1996, 2000.

[6] This cause is also related by Ephrem (Tonneau 1955: 66.1–4 [Syr.]; Matthews and Amar 1994: 147 [Eng.]; cf. Tonneau 1955: 66.25–27 [Syr.]; Matthews and Amar 1994: 148 [Eng.]), Narsai (Frishman 1992: Hom. IV.115–116, 127 with n. 42), Bar Koni (Scher 1910: 111.8–15 [Syr.]; Hespel and Draguet 1981: 125 [Fr.]), Išo'dad of Merv (Vosté and Van den Eynde 1950: 137.29–138.3 [Syr.]; Van den Eynde 1955: 149 [Fr.]), and Bar 'Ebroyo (Sprengling and Graham 1931: 46.8–12 [Syr.]; 47 [Eng.]).

seeking to make a name for themselves by building the tower.[7] Section 4 (lines 133–196) discusses the weariness and suffering that resulted from the rebellion. According to Jacob, the people of Babel were so consumed by their impulse to construct the tower that they were destroying themselves by attempting this impossible feat. Thus, Jacob seems to understand the end of Gen 11:6 ('nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them') to mean that the people would not rest until they had accomplished their work. Though not found in Ephrem, a similar interpretation of this verse occurs in Narsai and, more explicitly, in the later East Syriac exegetical literature.[8] Section 5 (lines 197–228) summarizes the people's act of rebellion and introduces God's merciful response of discipline.

In Section 6 (lines 229–256), Jacob narrates the next section of the Biblical text (Gen 11:5–7), in which God descends to see the construction of the tower and decides to scatter the people of Babel. The next four Sections of the *mimro* (7–10) provide an extended commentary on the interpretation of the phrase 'Come, let us descend' (Gen 11:7) with particular attention to the referent of the first person *plural* pronoun. This is, of course, a well-known *topos* of Christian exegetical literature on this pericope, including that of the Syriac tradition. Section 7 (lines 257–296), which summarizes Jacob's thought on the matter, begins by asking to whom the phrase 'Come, let us descend' was addressed. Jacob first responds in the negative that it was not said to the cherubim, seraphim, or any other angelic beings, which

[7] The connection between making a name and the causes of the rebellion is also found in Narsai (Frishman 1992: Hom. IV.130, cf. 103–104 with n. 38), Bar Koni (Scher 1910: 111.6–8 [Syr.]; Hespel and Draguet 1981: 125 [Fr.]), Išoʿdad of Merv (Vosté and Van den Eynde 1950: 137.14, 24–25 [Syr.]; Van den Eynde 1955: 149 [Fr.]), the author of the Diyarbakir commentary (Van Rompay 1986: 68.12–13 [Syr.]; 88 [Fr.]), and Bar ʿEbroyo (Sprengling and Graham 1931: 46.12–13 [Syr.]; 47 [Eng.]).

[8] For Narsai, see Frishman 1992: Hom. IV.180–193. In her otherwise excellent treatment, Frishman (1992: 113–114) slightly overstresses the differences between Jacob and Narsai's interpretation of this verse. For the later East Syriac exegetical literature, see the author of the Diyarbakir commentary (Van Rompay 1986: 68.15–18 [Syr.]; 88.4–7 [Fr.]) and Išoʿdad of Merv (Vosté and Van den Eynde 1950: 137.10–14 [Syr.]; Van den Eynde 1955: 149 [Fr.]). According to Ephrem, the phrase is to be interpreted as 'they will not escape punishment, for the opposite of that which they said, "lest we be scattered," will befall them' (Tonneau 1955: 66.11–12 [Syr.]; Matthews and Amar 1994: 147 [Eng.]).

is likely a polemic against one of the Jewish interpretations of his time.[9] After dismissing this interpretation, Jacob answers that the phrase 'Come, let us descend' signifies the hypostases (*qnume*) of the Son and Holy Spirit.[10] At the end of Section 7, Jacob asks why the revelation of the Son and Holy Spirit occurred in this particular passage, a question to which he later returns at length. In Section 8 (lines 297–328), Jacob resumes his anti-Jewish polemic in arguing that, contrary to the denials of the Jewish people, God does in fact have a Son. In Sections 9 (lines 329–374) and 10 (lines 375–402), Jacob reflects on why the Son was revealed at the scattering of the people of Babel. The answer for Jacob is that the Father acts through the Son in creation. This is intimated by the fact that a similar revelation of the Son occurs in the creation narrative with the phrase 'Let us make humanity in our image' (Gen 1:26).[11] Thus, the Son was revealed at the scattering of the people of Babel because it was a creative act. Based on this observation, Jacob proceeds to connect the Son with the creative power of the Father, which he exemplifies by an extended list of the Son's creative acts in Section 10 (lines 375–402).

The final three sections (11–13) explore the other principal theme of the *mimro*, namely God's merciful response of discipline (*marduto*).[12] In these sections, Jacob also expounds upon the various ironies found in the story of the tower of Babel, especially the scattering of those who did not want to

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[9] In Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, for instance, Gen 11:7 reads: 'Then the Lord said to the seventy angels (*ml'kyʾ*) who stand before him, "Come, then let us descend …".' (Clarke *et al.* 1984: 12; Maher 1992: 50 with n. 12 [Eng.]).

[10] A similar interpretation is found already in Ephrem (Tonneau 1955: 66.13–16 [Syr.]; Matthews and Amar 1994: 147 [Eng.]) and is also continued in the later exegetical traditions.

[11] The connection between Gen 1:26 and Gen 11:7 is also made by Narsai (Frishman 1992: Hom. IV.246–249), Bar Koni (Scher 1910: 114.7–8 [Syr.]; Hespel and Draguet 1981: 128 [Fr.]), Išoʿdad of Merv (Vosté and Van den Eynde 1950: 138.13–14 [Syr.]; Van den Eynde 1955: 150 [Fr.]), and the author of the Diyarbakir commentary (Van Rompay 1986: 68.21–23 [Syr.]; 88.11–13 [Fr.]).

[12] While absent in Ephrem, the interpretation of the division of languages in terms of mercy is found among the East Syriac exegetes, including Narsai (Frishman 1992: Hom. IV.198–199 with n. 65), Bar Koni (Scher 1910: 112.10–12 [Syr.]; Hespel and Draguet 1981: 126 [Fr.]), Išoʿdad of Merv (Vosté and Van den Eynde 1950: 138.24–25 [Syr.]; Van den Eynde 1955: 150 [Fr.]), and the author of the Diyarbakir commentary (Van Rompay 1986: 68.20–21 [Syr.]; 88.9–10 [Fr.]).

be scattered.[13] Section 11 (lines 403–472) describes the confusion that resulted when God divided the people's languages. This confusion was, however, an act of mercy since through it God created an opportunity for the spread of humanity and the cultivation of the earth. In Section 12 (lines 473–502), Jacob discusses what would have happened had God not scattered the people, i.e. they would have become too plentiful for one place and suffocated. Thus, God's scattering of the people was again an act of mercy. In Section 13 (lines 503–550), the final section of the *mimro*, the theme of God's merciful response of discipline is recapitulated. According to Jacob, God established humanity throughout the earth by means of the rebellion that occurred at Babel. Thus, God gave to the people of Babel in discipline the same gift that was given to Abraham as a blessing, and so God is truly merciful.

It is clear from this brief introduction that Jacob's *mimro* 'On the Tower of Babel' shares many similarities with other works in the Syriac exegetical tradition. Not surprisingly, Ephrem's influence on the *mimro* is significant. For instance, the interplay between divine justice (*ḵinuto*) and grace (*ṭaybuto*), a concept that is central to Ephrem's exegesis, figures prominently throughout the *mimro*. Equally interesting are the similarities that Jacob's *mimro* shares with a *mimro* on the same Biblical text written by Jacob's East-Syriac contemporary and rival Narsai.[14] Many of the rhetorical and literary features found in the *mimro* by Jacob also occur in that by Narsai.[15] In addition, while they do differ in several respects, both Narsai and Jacob interpret the story of the tower of Babel in terms of divine pedagogy.[16] For Jacob especially, God is the teacher who instructed the people of Babel who had gone astray. This theme of divine pedagogy is an important component of the East Syriac exegetical tradition, in which it ultimately seems to derive from Theodore of Mopsuestia and the teaching in the School of Edessa in

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[13] This irony is also commented upon by Ephrem (Tonneau 1955: 66.7–8 [Syr.]; Matthews and Amar 1994: 147 [Eng.]), Narsai (Frishman 1992: Hom. IV.168–169 with n. 58), and Išoʿdad of Merv (Vosté and Van den Eynde 1950: 137.15–16 [Syr.]; Van den Eynde 1955: 149 [Fr.]). Cf. Frishman 1992: 86.

[14] The Syriac text, with English translation, of Narsai's *mimro* 'On the Tower of Babel and the Division of Languages' can be found in Frishman 1992: Hom. IV.

[15] Compare, for example, the pun on *merdo* 'citadel; rebellion' (Frishman 1992: Hom. IV.88, 118) and the long list of 'let us…' statements by the people of Babel and God (Frishman 1992: Hom. IV.135–165, 222–231).

[16] For a comparison of their interpretations of Gen 11:1–9, see Frishman 1992: 113–115.

the first half of the fifth century. By incorporating it into this *mimro*, Jacob demonstrates his ability to creatively combine different currents within the Syriac tradition. Thus, the *mimro* 'On the Construction of the Tower of Babel' is especially interesting because in it Jacob intertwines these two traditions—Ephrem on the one hand, Theodore on the other—without any apparent conflict.[17]

SUMMARY

I. Proem introducing God's mercy in the form of discipline (1–44)
II. The rebellion of humanity (45–74)
III. The cause of the rebellion at Babel (75–132)
IV. The weariness and suffering that resulted from the rebellion (133–196)
V. The people's act of rebellion and God's merciful response of discipline (197–228)
VI. God descends to see the construction of the tower and decides to scatter the people of Babel (229–256)
VII. Interpretation of 'Come, let us descend' (257–296)
VIII. Defense that God has a Son (297–328)
IX. The Son was revealed at the scattering of the people of Babel because it was a creative act (329–374)
X. The creative acts of the Son (375–402)
XI. The confusion resulting from the divided languages (403–472)
XII. God's scattering of the people was an act of mercy (473–502)
XIII. Recapitulation of God's mercy in the form of discipline (503–550)

[17] Compare, on the other hand, the four *mimre* on creation that were edited by Alwan (1989), in which Jacob prefers Ephrem over against Theodore (cf. Van Rompay 1996: 638).

TEXT AND TRANSLATION

MIMRO 33 ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TOWER OF BABEL BY MOR JACOB[18]

I. PROEM INTRODUCING GOD'S MERCY IN THE FORM OF DISCIPLINE

How should I seek? For I have received abundantly, while rejecting.[19]
How should I turn away? For I have feared greatly, if I am silent.
I am beaten with silence and word as if with leather straps.
May your great compassion care for my petitions, Lord of the treasury.
May you, such as you are, give abundantly since you are so generous.
Indeed, your full treasury does not lack recipients.
It is pleasing for you to give generously every day,
but it is detestable that I have presumptuously rejected every day.
Lord, do not withhold your great compassion from those who reject,
for your sun even shines on the evil ones though they are not deserving; Matt 5:45
your rain waters the field of the heathen though he rejects you. Matt 5:45
Who does not hasten to your merciful gift?
The evil and the good receive their necessities from you,
and although they do not make restitution, they receive daily from your dominion.
Who makes restitution to you? For even the tongue that praises you

[18] Variant reading: '*Mimro* of the holy Mor Jacob on the construction of the tower and on the division of the languages'.

[19] Throughout this *mimro*, Jacob uses the root *ṭlm* in the sense of 'to deny or reject the grace of God'.

B 033 וכל חטאה ומלבלו וחכלו : ומנה מקדש.

1 אמר אחזו ומקנה נתנה לנו 1
אמר אהבו ומקנו ומשה לי אתם לנו׃
חמאתו מחכתו אשר בחזקו חמץ לנו
שוב ואל נקנה מנחת מלחתך ראו׃
5 לא אתאוה אשיא חטאת בם כמוהו לנו
לו ישב מאה איש מחנו בשקוד׃
כי אמנו ולבלתי כמוהו לנו:
כי בם שמו ומלחמה נחשף מנשלנו׃
לו מנה אחלו שוב ואל חכזבו:
10 ואם כל נתנו עשרה בם לו אתם׃ 2
כשחטה ושלח מחמו מנחתו בם כי אמר כי:
מאד לו נשכון כל מאוכלם מכרה ונשמו׃
נתנו אלחי אמכם שוב מאהבותם:
מאב לו קנכם מלחמה אתכם מנאולם׃
15 אם קנא כי ואל כאנו ומאחר כי:

lifts up praise to you from what is yours, and it is still a gift.
Even when it gives, it certainly receives, and so how does it make restitution?
All good things are pleasing to you who are entirely riches.
If even the one who praises you does not make restitution to you,
how can the one who is silent escape reproach?
Lord, I will not keep silent from your praise that is full of light;
I will prudently sing to you daily from that which is yours.
It is not from judgment that I fear and hasten to praise you;
let love incite me to speak about your gift.
If the sick desires a doctor who would heal him,
and if the one who is wounded desires a physician who might care for him,
so also the sick soul seeks the master of healing
who would send to it a medicine of mercy by which it might be healed.
Compassion is fitting for him, and mercy is abundant in him;
he is diligent to heal, and he is concerned about our health.
Even when he disciplines, his right hand is full of compassion,
and the rod for beating relaxes from discipline.
Wherever he waves (his hand) to strike the presumptuous in anger,
compassion remains and comforts the one who was beaten.
When the Merciful One beats, he is like a teacher;
love incites him to beat and hit the students.
It is not from evil that the teacher strikes the one whom he instructs;
he seeks to help, and because of that, he disciplines wisely.
The human race is daily in need of instruction,

⠓⠑ ⠺⠁⠎ ⠅⠊⠝ ⠞⠕ ⠓⠊⠍ ⠁⠇⠇ ⠞⠓⠁⠞ ⠞⠓⠑⠽ ⠎⠁⠊⠙ ⠞⠕ ⠓⠊⠍ ⠊⠝ ⠞⠓⠑ ⠍⠕⠗⠝⠊⠝⠛:
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for this freewill of ours has certainly rejected from the beginning.
Because Adam went astray and ate fruit from the tree, Gen 3:6
the earth was punished on account of him, mercifully at that time.
When the race of the upright defiled itself with the daughters of Cain,[20] Gen 6:1–2
mercy delivered the righteous Noah, and he was not corrupted. Gen 6:8–9:29

II. THE REBELLION OF HUMANITY

Again, rebellion was incited in the land of Babel,
and it was restrained by merciful discipline.
Had he disciplined our father Adam according to his transgression,
he would have died at the very moment that he ate the fruit. Gen 3:6
Had he struck (humanity) according to how he regretted making Adam, Gen 6:6
Noah would not have remained a remnant to settle the earth. Gen 9:1–29
Had he then also disciplined the children of Babel according to their transgressions, Gen 11:1–9
he would have vehemently consumed them with a wrathful fire.
For, the rebellion that occurred there was so great
that even language is powerless to speak about it.
Although there has been rebellion at different times,
that (rebellion) at Babel was exceedingly great and is unmentionable.
Humans who presumed to reach even to God in the height

[20] The identification of the sons of God and the daughters of men with the sons of Seth and the daughters of Cain, respectively, occurs already in Ephrem (cf. Kronholm 1978: 163–171) and is found throughout the Syriac tradition (Van Rompay 1986: 68 n. 20 [Fr.]; Frishman 1992: 73, 107; Brock and Kiraz 2006: 231 n. 7).

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and to trample through their actions the place of the watchers.[21]
O children of the earth, who greatly threatened, while raving frantically,[22]
to profane even the heavens through their behavior.
The story of Babel imposes shaking on the ones who hear it,
and the one who is discerning is shocked and amazed at how much she rejected.
Had I been confident that the ear thirsts for a *mimro* about her,
I would have been even more eager to speak about her action.
Perhaps, I should sound my voice concerning the history
of the daughter of the Chaldeans who greatly rebelled against the Creator.
Being astonished at her rejection, I will speak about her,
how much and how far she wrongly set about to act so presumptuously.
Therefore, prepare to listen sincerely, O discerning ones,
to this *mimro*, which is full of every profit for the one who gives heed to it.
Both the speaker and the listeners are coworkers;
the word of the one who speaks and of the one who gives heed is the same.
From the speaker and the listeners, one eulogy goes up
to the one who fashioned for us a mouth and ears in his wisdom.

[21] Based on Dan 4:17, Syriac authors often use the term 'watchers' (*'ire*) for angelic beings.

[22] This root also calls to mind ascension to heaven since it is used to describe the translation of Enoch (Heb 11:5). Also in lines 134, 175, 215, 221, 226, 237 (cf. 423).

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III. THE CAUSE OF THE REBELLION AT BABEL

Let us therefore hear about how much the daughter of Babel rebelled
against the Creator in that ill-famed construction.
Let us now seek the cause of this rebellion,
how it grew among the presumptuous ones without understanding.
The book of Moses teaches us the truth,
for it is a great storehouse in which every treasure is gathered.
The righteous Noah and his sons went out from the ark
and began to settle the earth which had been laid waste by the deluge. Gen 6:8–9:29
Mercy accompanied the human race
so that through heirs the land that had been overthrown would be preserved.
The righteous Noah became a new beginning, a second Adam,
and the successive generations on earth originated from his children.
The phrase 'Be fruitful and multiple' that was said showed its strength, Gen 1:22
(that is) 'let the offspring of humanity increase and settle'.
Every generation from the ark became renowned,
and the crowds and people of humanity began to increase.
They went out and found a land that had been laid waste by the floods,
an entire world that was devoid of heirs,
places that had been laid waste and were desolate of settlers,
and regions that were void of inhabitants.
When the people went out to settle,
rebellion showed her nature among the generations.

75 ܬܥܩ ܗܘܐ ܠܐ ܒܝ ܠܐ ܚܕ ܐܢܐ ܐܡܪ ܗܘܐ:
ܠܐ ܕܢܐ ܕܥ ܚܫܒ ܐܡܪ ܒܥܝ ܐܢܐ ܗܘ ܕܢ ܐܡܪ ܒܥ

The people and crowds clapped their hands[23] with one mind
to begin the wicked deed with a hardened heart:
Come, let us settle and dwell in might
so that, as a great crowd, we will not be scattered over the lands. Gen 11:4
Let each of us persist and not be scattered throughout the lands.
Let us be a people and not be called peoples on the earth.
Let us build a city that will not be vanquished by a deluge.
Let us erect a building that not even floods will overwhelm.
Let us begin a work that rivers will not dig out.
Let us make a citadel[24] that is able to provide safety from a deluge.
Let us build a tower that even if waters once again go out over the earth,
their floods may touch it, but not overturn it.
Let us lay foundations so that even if the great sea bursts forth
with powerful waves, it will not shake them nor will they be harmed.
Let us strongly build something new that will not fall
so that not even the deep waters, if they break forth, will reach it.
Let us build and raise up[25] to the heavens by our workmanship
a great fortress in the awesome name of might.
Let us ascend and be neighbors with the sun in its high place,
and our dwelling place will be close to it.

[23] The idiom, which occurs again in line 255, refers to uniting enthusiastically (cf. 2 Kings 11:12).

[24] Note the pun on *merdo*, which is homophonous with a word meaning 'rebellion' (cf. lines 135, 235).

[25] Reading *nasseq* ('af'el) instead of Bedjan's *nessaq* (p'al).

6 ואמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יוצדק:
כתובות הבעל והאשה חלוקין
בשלשה דברים בכתובה ובמזונות ובמיתה:
100 בכתובה שכתובתה מנה והכניסה לו מאתים
שבועה שמא לא כתב לה אלא מנה:
במזונות שהיה נותן לה בכל יום ויום
ונתן לה מזונות של שבוע ושל שבועים:
ואמר שמא לא נתן לה אלא של יום אחד ושל יומים
105 במיתה שמת ואמרה אשה מתה אני ואמר אף אני מתתי
נכנסו אלו ליורשיה ואלו ליורשיו
ואמרו יורשיה לא נתת לה אלא מנה
ויורשיו אמרו לא נתנו לה אלא מאתים
ואמרו יורשיה לא נתת לה אלא של יום אחד
ואמרו יורשיו לא נתנו לה אלא של שבוע ושל שבועים
110 ואמרו יורשיה לא נתת לה אלא מנה
ואמרו יורשיו לא נתנו לה אלא מאתים:
ואמרו יורשיה לא נתת לה אלא של יום אחד
ואמרו יורשיו לא נתנו לה אלא של שבוע ושל שבועים
ואמרו יורשיה לא נתת לה אלא מנה
115 ואמרו יורשיו לא נתנו לה אלא מאתים:

Let us ascend and stand on the path where the moon crosses,
and let us gaze upon the change of the seasons, as they turn.
Come, let us attain the stars of light in their paths,
and come, let us make for ourselves a name that is more distinguished than theirs. Gen 11:4
Come, let us ascend to where the hosts cross,
and let us be companions to the orbit that bears the seasons.
Let us build a castle which is the beginning and the end,
which there has been nothing like it on earth nor will there be.
Come, let us make for ourselves a city that reaches even to the heavens,
and let us dwell there in a place that is above destruction.
Let us make an amazing staircase through our union,
and let us ascend on it from the earth up to the height of air.
Let us go beyond the clouds and settle above them.
Let us leave behind the winds and ascend to an even greater height.
Let us mold bricks and bake them in fire. Gen 11:3
Let us raise up with fired stones a building that will not collapse.

IV. THE WEARINESS AND SUFFERING THAT RESULTED FROM THE REBELLION

The wretched ones pulsated with these impulses of rebellion,
and they gathered and made a celebration for error, as they raved.
They rebelled against the Lord, and they did not understand
that their deed could not be accomplished. Gen 11:6
They embarked on a great work that had no reward
and a harsh labor in infamy that could not be finished.
Great error hired the children of iniquity

ܘܐܡܪ ܠܗ ܡܪܝ ܐܢ ܐܝܬ ܠܟ ܚܝܠܐ ܠܡܫܕܐ ܠܝ ܐܢ ܐܬܐ ܠܟ ܒܣܦܪ ܚܝܐ ܕܐܢܐ ܐܟܬܒ ܠܟ

and made them evil laborers in that construction.
They molded bricks and began building—just as they had planned— Gen 11:3
a ridiculous tower so that creation would be aware of its fall.
They began without understanding, and they did not finish,
the foolish who became an example in the world for all who come.
A hardened heart assured them at the beginning,
but judgment shamed them toward the end.
They approached the act of rebellion with a blind understanding,
filled with pride concerning the mighty construction.
Justice, however, allowed them to begin
so that it might bring them down through that work by way of punishment.
It bound the wild animals as if with a yoke
so that they would become wearied through that work because of their presumptuousness.
He beat them with the great work as if with a rod,
that Wise One who knows how to beat kindly.
He allowed them to begin the work that they had desired
so that through it and from it he might beget the pain that would harass them.
He broke them through the labor of that construction,
and not from afar he brought a rod to discipline them.
He wisely delivered them to the labor that they wanted
so that they would have no excuse when they were harassed.
It was not from his own accord that he took out the rod and struck them;
he allowed them to strike themselves by their own hand, just as they desired.
Had he not delivered them to discipline,
he would not have allowed them to begin as they had planned,

23 ⁘ ⁘ ⁘

and in the same way that he forbid that the construction be completed,
he would have stopped that idea from commencing.
In his wisdom, he allowed them to begin
so that he might beat them with that labor on account of their foolishness.
Great labor fell upon those children of iniquity
who were deserving of it because they had exalted themselves against the Creator.
It was a rebellion that had been born out of freewill,
so when someone was beaten, he could not say anything.
They were severely beaten on their own account.
Who questions that beating which was the result of free-choice?
The deed that they desired punished them as they raved;
they became exhausted from labor without being restrained from the construction.
They worked with bricks until their limbs failed,
the hired ones of error whom she bound in her slavery.
The work that they desired stretched over them and harassed them,
and that exhaustion that they were seeking also crushed them.
The Lord laughed—if he does laugh—and he mocked as is written, Ps 59:8; Prov 1:26
for that idea that harassed them was a cause of laughter.
For, they were agitated that the construction was not complete;
they were laboring and harassed since their deed had not come to an end.
They were greatly afflicted, and they did not wish to rest;
there was anxiety in the night and harsh labor in the day.
The wretched ones baked bricks in the fire and fired the soil Gen 11:3

ܐܡܪ ܒܛܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܘܠܐ ܬܥܒܕܢ ܐܢ ܚܫܘܒ: 165
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ܙܩܦ ܐܢܐ ܟܬܒܬܐ ܕܡܦܫܩܢܝ:
ܒܗ ܐܢܐ ܟܬܒ ܠܟ ܒܟܠ ܙܒܢ ܕܐ ܒܗ ܐܢܐ ܗܘܝ܂
ܠܐ ܙܒܢ ܐܚܪ ܬܒܛܠ ܕܒܪ ܐܚܪ:
ܘܐܢ ܐܡܪ ܐܢܐ ܠܟ ܕܐ ܒܟܠ ܙܒܢ ܐܢ ܐܬ ܒܗ ܐܢܐ ܗܘܝ܂ 170
ܐܢ ܐܡܪ ܐܢܐ ܠܟ ܕܐ ܒܟܠ ܙܒܢ ܐܢ ܐܬ ܒܗ ܐܢܐ ܗܘܝ:

so that weariness increased and harassed them in every way.
They hated their lives from the exhaustion that fell upon them,
and they did not want to abandon the work that harassed them.
Their spirit became weary from that painful labor,
and they were still working vigorously so that the construction might be completed.
The strength of their limbs failed from exhaustion,
and error was continually present in their thoughts.
They loathed the work, but did not wish to cease from the construction;
they were pressed from exhaustion and still hastening toward more beating.

V. THE PEOPLE'S ACT OF REBELLION AND GOD'S MERCIFUL RESPONSE OF DISCIPLINE

When they were harassed and not wishing to be refrained
and were greatly punished, beating was still cherished.
Time passed, and the construction was not complete;
days passed, and the hardened heart was not softened.
The Judge ordered that they had been beaten enough while being ignorant:
certainly, they do not realize how far they are from relief.
His mercy moved him to restrain them from that labor,
and he construed a means of employing discipline.
He showed his zeal, as one threatening, concerning the rebels
while he was mercifully restraining them from harm.
The Merciful One wished to mitigate the harsh beating,
and he prepared for the rebels a different punishment.
Although mercy incited him concerning the rebels,
in the form of rage, he threatened the children of iniquity.
Justice saw that they were not restraining themselves from evil,

וְחַכָּלוֹ פַּרְוַחַיִם לְאִשָּׁה לְוַאי אִם־אַחִים הָיוּ׃
אֲשֶׁר שָׁכְבָה עִם בַּעְלָהּ וְאֵינָהּ יוֹדַעַת מָה:
190 וְלוֹ יִהְיֶה נִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל הַגֹּאֵל׃
חֲלָצָהּ וְיָשְׁבָה עִם הוֹא לְוַאי וְיִשְׁמְעוּ יוֹאָב:
וְאַחַר אֲחֵרִים כֹּל הַנִּשְׁבָּר וְהַנֶּאֱכָל יוֹאָב׃
אָבַל שְׁלֹשׁ וְעֶשְׂרִים עִם בַּעְלָהּ:
וַיַּכֵּם שָׁכַב הַנִּשְׁמָע אֶחָד יוֹאָב׃
195 נָבָה עִם הַגֹּאֵל וְלוֹ יֵרֶד נֵאכָל עִם הַנִּשְׁבָּר:
הַזֶּה עִם לְוַאי וְאַחַר מְחֻיָּב יוֹאָב כֹּל פַּרְעֹשׁ׃
יוֹאָב עִם יֵאָחֲזוּ וְעֶשְׂרִים לֹא יִהְיֶה יוֹאָב:
וְחַכָּה אֶכֶל וְאַחַר הַנִּזְרָעוֹת אֶחָד יוֹאָב׃
וְיֵצֵא זֶרַע וְאָבָה הַנִּשְׁבָּר לֹא אֶחָזַק:
200 וְחַנָּה מַזְרֵעַ וְכַחַל אֶחָד לֹא אֶחָזַק׃
אֶחָד נִשְׁבַּע וְקִנְאָה כַּכֶּסֶף בַּת וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה:
11 וְאִישׁ לֹא אֶחָפֵּשׂ זִבְחוּ לְמַטָּה לֹא יִשְׂתַּחֲוֶה׃
וְכֵן יָצָא אָמַר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶחָד עִם וְזֶה זִבְחוּ:
וְכַחַל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְחַפְּנֵיהֶם אֶחָד יוֹאָב׃
205 מִפִּי לְמַטָּה אִם יָרַק יוֹאָב כֹּל מְנֻחָה:
בַּת וָאֶה תִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה יָרֵק יוֹאָב כֹּה עִם שָׁרֵפוּ׃
רוּחַ נִשְׁמַע וְיִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה יוֹאָב כֹּה מִצְרַיִם:
וְאִם מְנֻחָה יֵאָחֲזוּ לְמַטָּה כֹּל מְנֻחָה׃
וְכַת לְכָה תִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה אֶכֶזְרִיּוֹת יוֹאָב כֹּל מְנֻחָה:
210 חַנְיָה מִשְׁאָה אֶחָד יוֹאָב כֹּתֶב כָּלָה׃
שְׁאֵל פָּלְטִיאֵל וְלֹא אֶחָפֵּשׂ עִם כְּתֹבֶת:

and it turned in its vehemence against the deed:
Why is there this evil deed that does not come to an end?
How long shall I allow them to provoke?
A great atrocity the people of the earth are committing in their raving,
that they might leave the earth and reach even to the heavens through this labor.
The mortals threatened the limitless height
that they might limit it despite being feeble in their deeds.
The wretched race set up an attack on the Creator
that it might conquer the height of his power through its own construction.
The soil of the earth was raving frantically without success
that it might conquer step-by-step the high district of the watchers.
The earthly advanced in an assault against the heavenly
that they might settle above the air like the spiritual.
O wretched ones, you have ascended far enough, desist from your work;
O ignorant ones, you have advanced far enough, cease raving.
Weary ones to no purpose, enter peaceful rest;
lovers of labor, be delivered shortly from weariness.

VI. GOD DESCENDS TO SEE THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TOWER AND DECIDES TO SCATTER THE PEOPLE OF BABEL

Again, I am speaking of the great laughingstock of the daughter of the Chaldeans;
again, prepare your minds for me, O discerning ones.
It is astonishing to relate how much she set about her presumptuousness;
it is amazing to hear how much her iniquity advanced.
The wretched one assaulted the height of the hosts,
and she did not shy away from rising so far in her audacity.

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Through that construction, she rebelled against the Creator
in order to conquer the place to which she would arrive in her ascent.
Weak humans proceeded in an assault, as they raved,
in order to set up an attack on the dreadful guard of the watchers.
While the Creator was patient, and they were not restraining themselves,
he sought to restrain them mercifully from weariness.
Let us summon Moses, and may he tell about the affair,
for it is easy for him to signify to us about hidden things:
And the Lord descended in order to see that construction, Gen 11:5
which the workers of iniquity had begun building through their actions.
The Lord said, 'The people are one and so is language, Gen 11:6
and because they plan to do this, though they are feeble,
come, let us descend and divide them in their languages, Gen 11:7
and let us scatter them from the rebellious unity.
Let us beat them with their languages as if with leather straps,
and let us scatter them to every region just as they had thought. Gen 11:8
Let us deprive them of that iniquitous unity,
and let us settle them each as different peoples throughout the lands.
They will not be called a people on earth, but rather peoples,
not in one land, but in all lands.
They clapped their hands, formed a crowd, and settled;
let us scatter them because they feared being scattered'. Gen 11:8

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ܘܐܢܐ ܐܡܪ ܠܟ ܕܐܢܬ ܗܝ ܟܐܦܐ ܥܠ ܗܕܐ ܒܥܠܡܐ ܘܥܠ ܗܕܐ ܟܢܫܬܐ ܩܕܝܫܬܐ ܕܐܢܬ ܒܢܐ ܠܝ ܥܠ ܗܝ ܓܒܪܐ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܫܡ ܒܥܠܡ ܕܐܬܐ ܘܚܝܐ ܕܠܥܠܡ ܠܐ ܢܫܬܟܚ ܘܠܐ ܢܬܚܫܒ ܒܗ ܐܦ

VII. INTERPRETATION OF 'COME, LET US DESCEND'

The symbols that Moses included in his reading are amazing;
the matters are hidden, and who will define their interpretation?
It is written: the Lord said, 'Come let us descend'; Gen 11:7
here there is a debate with the Jew concerning the reading.
Whom did he tell to descend with him as he was descending?
Who was worthy to be his companion as he was disciplining?
Who was able to hear that phrase
so that 'Come, let us descend' might be said to him? Gen 11:7
If he was not signifying his Son who was with him,
whom was he calling to descend with him on account of the matter?
If you suppose that he called to the cherubim, it was not heard,
and if you think that he spoke to the seraphim, your blaspheme increases.
It was said neither to the watchers nor to the angels,
nor was it proclaimed to the crowds of fire.[26]
So then, to whom did he say, 'Come let us descend', Gen 11:7
as he was descending?
It was to his Beloved who is like him in divinity.
The word was above the angels, and they could not grasp it,
and the attendants of the Divine were not worthy of it.
The hypostases of the Son and the Holy Spirit were signified
in the revelation of that expression 'Come let us descend'. Gen 11:7

[26] 'Crowds of fire' is another term for angelic beings.

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The cherubim are bound with an awesome yoke as they tremble;
know, discerning ones, that it was not to them that he said, 'Let us descend'. Gen 11:7
The seraphim are hiding their faces from him in their wings;
it was also not to these that he said, 'Come', for they are servants.[27] Gen 11:7
His Son alone is worthy of that expression,
and the Spirit who is from him heard it when it was said.
The revered hypostases of inscrutable divinity
were signified for the one who hears discerningly,
but the one who flees from the interpretation that has been spoken by us
introduces companions or gods with God. Jer 2:28
It is blasphemous for us to make companions to that Being;
let us give to the Son and to the Spirit their due in what was spoken.
It is not that he uses a voice with his Beloved,
nor does he speak in words to the Spirit as with corporeal beings.
That Essence shares one hint and one will,
and without voices, they are equal and simple in divinity.
So then, why did he use a voice here?
He revealed the hidden symbol so that it would be said.
He wished to explain outwardly these things that were inside,
and to speak these hidden things with simple sounds.

VIII. DEFENSE THAT GOD HAS A SON

Although he revealed his story in multiple places,

[27] This may refer to an argument that is found in later authors, such as Išoʿdad of Merv (Vosté and Van den Eynde 1950: 138.9–21 [Syr.]; Van den Eynde 1955: 150 [Fr.]), that God would have used 'go' instead of 'come' when speaking to inferiors. Cf. Frishman 1992: 84.

ܒܬܪ ܕܐܡܪ ܠܗ ܡܪܝ ܒܝܬ ܐܒܗ ܕܐܝܟ ܕܐܢܐ ܐܙܠ ܒܥܐ ܠܡܐܙܠ ܒܗ ܐܦ:
ܐܠܐ ܐܢ ܐܡܪ ܐܒܐ ܠܐ ܐܦ ܐܢܐ ܐܙܠ ܒܥܐ ܠܡܐܙܠ ܒܗ ܐܦ:

the Jew is angry (saying), 'God has no son'.
Although (God) humbled himself to use even a voice,
the symbols and their interpretations are rejected by the Jews.
Although he signaled that he has a Son who is like him,
the blind people[28] still insist that he is without a Son.
The indications are in the readings, and they do not perceive;
the symbols of the Son are in all of the books, and they do not understand.
They are like a blind person who although the sun is strong in its sunrise,
it does not give him enough light to discern the shapes of figures.
The blind person is not culpable, because he greatly yearns to see the light;
the Jew is culpable for he flees from the light.[29]
The deaf one (confronted) with the hint would not reject these symbols,
but the Jew is worse than the deaf one and does not understand.
The blind man desires to see the light and the deaf to hear;
the people hate the light and hearing out of their freewill.
By their choice, 'they made heavy their ears', just as it is written. Isa 6:10
Who will convince them to accept the words of truth?
In their freewill, they also shut their eyes from the light,
and they do not want to see the light that is in the reading.
The symbols of the Son resemble the sun on the regions (of earth),

[28] Following earlier Syriac authors (Murray 2004: 41–68), Jacob sometimes uses the singular of *'ammo* 'people' to refer specifically to Jewish people.

[29] Note the pun on light and the Son as the Light (John 8:12).

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and the foolish have closed their eyes and do not gaze upon him.
The world has perceived the loud thunder which resounds concerning him,
but the people have shut their ears in order not to hear.
Had they wanted to open their eyes that they had shut,
they would have seen the image of the Son from the reading.
Had they wanted to open their ears that they had closed,
they would have heard the story of the Son in all of the books.
Since they wish neither to hear nor to see,
all of the true symbols are rejected by them.
The Father made known in a clear voice that he has a Son,
and the people have rejected that he has even spoken about his Beloved.

IX. THE SON WAS REVEALED AT THE SCATTERING OF THE PEOPLE OF BABEL BECAUSE IT WAS A CREATIVE ACT

Let us now leave the story of the people who do not listen to us,
and may the symbol be spoken clearly by us without debate.
In the story of Babel, the Lord said, 'Come, let us descend'; Gen 11:7
this is clear to the one who listens discerningly.
Here the hypostases have been explained clearly,
truly (the hypostases) of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
He did not say, 'Let me descend', but rather, 'Let us descend', in order to signify Gen 11:7
his Son who was hidden in him eternally.
He signaled to the world that there truly are the hypostases of the Spirit and the Son
so that they would not regard the Son of Truth as a stranger when he would appear.

ܡܟܬܒ ܐܢܬ ܠܡ ܬܫܬܘ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܫܘܠ ܘܐܬ ܠܐ

Why was it necessary for that symbol to be spoken
at that deed of the rebellious daughter of the Chaldeans?
It was the beginning of the peoples going forth to (different) lands,
and the Father did not do anything without his Son.
He intended to settle the earth which was barren,
and he called on the Intermediary to cultivate[30] the lands.
Through his Son, he constituted the worlds in the beginning,
and here he showed that through him he would establish the lands.
Just as he said in the beginning, 'Let us make humanity in our image', Gen 1:26
so he said here, 'Come, let us descend', on account of this matter. Gen 11:7
The symbol of our Lord is the beginning and the end,
for 'nothing came to be without him', just as is written. John 1:3
He was clearly manifest when the Father was forming Adam;
he was manifest again here when the earth was divided for the peoples.
He was separating the different generations within Babel,
and he sent them to the desolate regions.
Since the Father made a beginning for the people there,
it was necessary that he make known his Beloved, who was with him.
It was time for different nations to settle the earth,
and the Father showed through whom he would cultivate it.
Therefore, he called to his Son as if by a voice:

[30] *Lit.* 'to pacify'. In its most basic sense, the root *šyn* is related to a meaning of 'peace'. Throughout the *mimro*, however, Jacob uses this root with a specialized meaning of 'to cultivate (the land)', i.e. 'to pacify the land'.

הָאָרֶץ כִּי־לֹא הִמְטִיר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ
340 וְאָדָם אַיִן לַעֲבֹד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה׃ וְאֵד יַעֲלֶה מִן־הָאָרֶץ
וְהִשְׁקָה אֶת־כָּל־פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה׃ וַיִּיצֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים
אֶת־הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים
וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה׃ וַיִּטַּע יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים גַּן־בְּעֵדֶן
345 מִקֶּדֶם וַיָּשֶׂם שָׁם אֶת־הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר יָצָר׃ וַיַּצְמַח יְהוָה
אֱלֹהִים מִן־הָאֲדָמָה כָּל־עֵץ נֶחְמָד לְמַרְאֶה וְטוֹב לְמַאֲכָל
וְעֵץ הַחַיִּים בְּתוֹךְ הַגָּן וְעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וָרָע׃ וְנָהָר
יוֹצֵא מֵעֵדֶן לְהַשְׁקוֹת אֶת־הַגָּן וּמִשָּׁם יִפָּרֵד וְהָיָה
לְאַרְבָּעָה רָאשִׁים׃ שֵׁם הָאֶחָד פִּישׁוֹן הוּא הַסֹּבֵב
350 אֵת כָּל־אֶרֶץ הַחֲוִילָה אֲשֶׁר־שָׁם הַזָּהָב׃ וּזְהַב הָאָרֶץ
18 הַהִוא טוֹב שָׁם הַבְּדֹלַח וְאֶבֶן הַשֹּׁהַם׃ וְשֵׁם־הַנָּהָר
הַשֵּׁנִי גִּיחוֹן הוּא הַסֹּבֵב אֵת כָּל־אֶרֶץ כּוּשׁ׃ וְהַנָּהָר
הַשְּׁלִישִׁי חִדֶּקֶל הַהֹלֵךְ קִדְמַת אַשּׁוּר וְהַנָּהָר
355 הָרְבִיעִי הוּא פְּרָת׃ וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם
וַיַּנִּחֵהוּ בְּגַן־עֵדֶן לְעָבְדָהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ׃ וַיְצַו יְהוָה
אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָאָדָם לֵאמֹר מִכֹּל עֵץ־הַגָּן אָכֹל תֹּאכֵל׃
וּמֵעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וָרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ כִּי בְּיוֹם

Let us descend to the earth, and let us divide them in their languages. Gen 11:7
While there are no words between him and the Father,
here the symbol became manifest in word lest it remain hidden.
While the will of that Essence is in agreement with his Being (i.e. the Father's),
(here) the voice went forth so that the Father could make known that he has a Son.
The story is higher than literal (*lit.* corporeal) understanding,
and it was said only in spiritual rational.[31]
The fact that the Lord said 'Let us descend to earth', Gen 11:7
only a hidden understanding is able to grasp it as it has been said.
The hidden hint produced the voice according to the will,
and for that will, the wondrous Moses wrote down the voice.
To the hints of the Father, he gave names in word and voice,
and he wrote down that which he wanted, namely 'the Lord said…'. Gen 11:7
Through his prophecy, he wanted to reveal the revered hypostases
in that which he wrote: The Lord said, 'Let us descend to earth'. Gen 11:7

X. THE CREATIVE ACTS OF THE SON

In that revelation of the learned Moses, it has been signified to us
that the Father established the creatures and works thereof through his Son.
Through him, the symbols of the Father are heard according to his will.

[31] For the literal (*paġronoyo*) and spiritual (*ruḥonoyo*) senses of scripture in Jacob of Sarug, the latter of which he often employs in anti-Jewish polemic, see Sony 1979–1980: 85–95.

360 ܘܢܫܐ ܠܐܘܟܐ ܟܚܟܥܬܐ ܒܩܠ ܐܢܐ ׃
ܒ ܟܐ ܩܠܐ ܐܡܐ ܟܡܪܚܐ ܟܐ ܟܐ ܠܐܟܐ׃
ܗܘܒܐ ܚܟܟܐ ܘܫ ܗܘܐ ܐܙܐ ܘܐ ܫܡܩܐ׃
ܟܒ ܙܥܢܐ ܘܗܘ ܐܡܐܐ ܐܐ ܟܡ ܢܟ ܗ׃
ܥܐ ܒܩ ܗܘܐ ܘܒܘܐ ܐܟ ܙܐܡ ܟܐ ܢܟܙܐ׃
365 ܙܡ ܩܐ ܟܙܟ ܟܟ ܩܘܟܐ ܩܢܙܢܐ׃
ܟܐ ܚܘܐ ܙܡܢܐ ܘܩܟ ܟܡܩܟ׃
ܐ ܩ ܗܘ ܘܩܟ ܟܙܐ ܘܢܫܐ ܠܐܘܟ׃
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ܙܟܐ ܩܡܐ ܟܟܩܐ ܟܐܐ ܙܥܢܐ׃
370 ܗܟ ܟܥܥܢܐ ܐܐ ܒܟܐ ܐܩܟܐ ܩܟܟ׃
ܟܙܟܗ ܗܘܒܐ ܙܐ ܟܟ ܐ ܐܐ ܟܒܟ ܐܢ׃
ܒܟ ܙ ܙܐ ܟܐ ܟܟ ܟܙ ܩܟ ܗ ܟ ׃
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Through him, the heavenly hosts are commanded.
Through him, the hidden and revealed worlds were established.
Through him, the creatures came into existence from the beginning.
He is the power of that Mighty One that bears the creatures;
his hidden wisdom and the great strength of his creative power;
the image, praise, and revered splendor of that Essence;
the Only-Begotten, Son, Lord, and child of the Father;
the one who fashions the worlds, establishes the creatures, and creates the depths;
who completes the heights, weighs the mountains, and stretches out the valleys;
who collects the seas, forms humanity, and fashions babes;
who provides children, causes the winds to blow, and makes the rains fall;
who sends the dew, makes the sun shine, and causes the moon to change;
who rules over below, commands to above, and signals to the watchers;
who causes the cherubs to fear, makes the ranks tremble, and is awesome among the angelic orders;
who is glorious on the throne, praised among the crowds, and hidden from the spirits;
who is concealed by fire, knowledgeable of the worlds, and skilled in his actions;
who is in the company of beings above, resplendent among beings below, and revered by all.
Through him, the hints of the Father have come to pass from eternity,
and through him, all of his intentions are actually being accomplished.
His great image is depicted in the scriptures for those who understand,

ܗܘ ܗܘ ܡܬܟܠܐ ܒܥܠܡܐ ܕܫܘܬܐ׃
ܗܘ ܐܝܟܢܐ ܕܚܩܠ ܕܫܬܐ ܘܟܠ ܟܠ׃
ܗܘ ܬܬܐ ܐܢ ܟܐܘܬ ܗܝ ܫܘܘܬ׃ 380
ܐܘܬ ܡܢ ܟܠ ܕܫܬܐ׃
ܡܢܗܐ ܗܘ ܕܚܠ ܕܐ ܒܐ ܘܒ ܐܢ ܐܢ׃
ܪܟܠ ܫܘܬ ܐܢ ܗܘ ܐܢ ܐܢ׃
ܡܬܐ ܒܐ ܗܘ ܐܢ ܘܐ׃
ܐܢ ܚܩܠ ܗܘ ܐܢ ܐܢ ܐܢ׃ 385
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and the form of his beauty is in the readings for those who take notice.
When reading the story of Babel, humanity encounters him,
for he was with his Father when the lands were divided.
It is about him that that expression that was heard was signified:
the Lord said, 'Let us descend and divide every language'. Gen 11:7

XI. THE CONFUSION RESULTING FROM THE DIVIDED LANGUAGES

It was unity that wanted to rebel against God,
and he put divisions in their languages and divided them.
They made peace so that through that peace the earth might be laid waste,
but the Wise of Heart raised the sword so that he might cultivate the earth.[32] Job 9:4
The people were one, and language was one, but he confused them
so that that confusion would become the cause for him to establish the world.
When the generations were flourishing in one region,
and that construction was rebelling through the great labor,
and the workers of error were laboring assiduously in that which they had planned,
and they possessed one evil will toward God,
and all of them had one language without variation,
then the Lord responded in judgment
so that the rebellion would be brought to an end by discipline,
and so that the great work would be obstructed through that beating.

[32] *Lit.* 'so that he might pacify the earth'. See the note to line 344.

ܐܙܘܢܐ ܒܓܘܫܡܐ ܕܝܠܗ ܡܬܬܠ ܟܒܫܐ ܕܪܥܝܐ ܘܒܪ ܐܢܫ ܠܐ ܝܕܥ ܠܗ ܘܠܐ ܫܠܝܛ ܒܗ:
ܘܒܟܠ ܝܘܡ ܐܟܘܠ ܒܗ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܒܪ ܡܠܟܐ ܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܘܠܐ ܡܫܬܘ ܘܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܠܗ:
ܐܝ ܡܛܠ ܕܐܢܐ ܐܡܪ ܠܟ ܕܬܗܘ ܠܟ ܠܐ ܠܚܕܐ ܐܠܐ ܠܟ ܘܠܒܢܝܟ ܘܠܒܢܝ ܒܢܝܟ ܘܠܟ ܐܡܪ ܐܢܐ ܕܐܝ ܐܬ ܠܟ ܠܡܫܬܘܬ ܚܡܪܐ ܘܠܐ ܠܡܫܟܚ ܠܗ ܠܥܠܡ ܘܠܥܠܡܝ ܥܠܡܝܐ ܐܡܝܢ ܣܠܐ ܗܘ

Suddenly, while they were engaged and hastening about the work,
the command signaled and divided them in their languages.
That rebellious speech that they possessed was confused,
and no one could understand the language of another.
If this one summoned that one to do something,
he would not answer him, because he did not know what he was saying to him.
They began speaking nonsense, like insane people, one to another,
and no one knew what another there was saying.
If any one of them greeted another,
he would suppose that it was certainly an insult that was hurled at him.
Every one of them thought that he alone
spoke properly and that the speech of all the others was confused.
They were amazed at how each one spoke against the other,
and not one of them understood the word of another.
The wretched proceeded to speak in different languages,
and a confused clamor increased there without order.
Every one of them thought of himself as wise,
and so spoke more abundantly without listeners.
Every person took pains to silence the speech of others,
and all of them did so, and the clamorous dispute increased.
They did not know that it was discipline from God,
and all of the foolish people who had gone astray were blaming one another.
They did not understand that the Lord had placed divisions on them,
and this one was blaming that one with a hardened heart.
The hidden Teacher descended in order to divide their languages,

ⵜⵉⵎⵙⵙⵓⵔⵉⵏ ⵏ ⵜⵣⵔⴼⵜ ⵏ ⵡⵓⵙⵙⵓⵏ ⵏ ⵜⵣⵔⴼⵜ ⵏ ⵜⵎⵣⵡⵓⵔⵜ.

ⵜⵉⵎⵙⵙⵓⵔⵉⵏ ⵏ ⵜⵣⵔⴼⵜ ⵏ ⵡⵓⵙⵙⵓⵏ ⵏ ⵜⵣⵔⴼⵜ ⵏ ⵜⵎⵣⵡⵓⵔⵜ:
ⵜⵉⵎⵙⵙⵓⵔⵉⵏ ⵏ ⵜⵣⵔⴼⵜ ⵏ ⵡⵓⵙⵙⵓⵏ ⵏ ⵜⵣⵔⴼⵜ ⵏ ⵜⵎⵣⵡⵓⵔⵜ.

and they did not know what the cause of their confusion was.
The Lover of Peace raised the sword and scattered them,
and since they were acting foolishly, they did not understand their actions.
The wretched ceased from that idle labor,
and through the conflict of their languages, they were crippled.
They now hated the deed of that construction which they had desired,
and every person was concerned about how he would justify himself in the matter there.
Their spirit loathed the confused speech that had come to pass,
and they lost hold of the ridiculous tower that was being erected.
They hated one another, because they had desired rebelliously,
and they began to flee and be scattered from one another.
In that strife, the work of rebellion ceased,
and weariness that was to no purpose stood in amazement.
The work fell from their dexterous hands,
and the toil of that painstaking labor ceased.
The craftsmen ceased, the dexterous (workers) were dumbstruck, and the swift (laborers) came to rest;
the superintendents became angry, the transporters fled, and the builders descended.
The work that they had first desired became an abomination to its workers,
and those who had been eager concerning the construction left it and fled.
The Wise One of the Ages raised his voice at that unity,
and the voices increased, and the workers ceased from the work.

ولا يبكي وهو أبا حزنا وكظيظا من الغيظ؛
ويعم همنا أوعد يحيا وأنى:
وهكذا وهو لا أحاشه فحيتنوه؛
445 حلق ونتا في وه خطا وهنفعا:
وحلمه وقاتل من وهو؛
هذه كحيه وه خيبا ونسفي وه حه:
ولا إنه يرح ونمط ترفا حفحا أمي؛
حفظ ومسه حفصحا حكلا وهمله وها:
450 وقاتل أبا حفيظ خيبا وفحاكي وها؛
هذه كسوا سك ويعده وه ينزلنا:
ومنه خيفي بي في يحيه حفحزق؛
حوه هزاا حلا فحيبا ونزوقا:
ولعا لا فقط لاا أمي وهنفعا؛
455 بقا وها حبا في أيتوه فعيتا:
وحلا خطا وهو فكحا وسفلا وها؛ 23
حلق أوعتا اعده فعيتا نسه فكتلا:
وبه فنقها حنه لكتنا سله كنتا؛
حبا ونسطا وها هفلالا في خفوقاوه:
460 وهيحرم وه خلا خينه هفقوه وحنه؛
يفعم خحقا أوعد فلا حوه أوناا:
وهيمه قلا وحلق خطا في فحيبا؛

He became the hidden Lord for the Babylonians and they were unaware,
and he taught each of them a language.
O disciples who have learned and completed their instruction,
without being aware of the Master who affirmed them.
The Teacher, who is full of wisdom, brought in the foolish youth
and taught them all languages with one hint.
In their ignorance, they did not even understand that they were learning;
in his wisdom, he taught them as they were unaware.
Skilled is the Master who even though the students did not want it,
in his wisdom, he instilled instruction and filled them with it.

XII. GOD'S SCATTERING OF THE PEOPLE WAS AN ACT OF MERCY

Consider, discerning ones, how his detestable things are also beautiful,
and how his evil things are also good for the one who understands.
He disciplined the Babylonians through the division of their languages,
and that discipline became the cause for him to establish the world.
The earth was settled through that strife which occurred there,
for they were scattered to every region for that reason.
As he was striking and correcting those who had been corrupted,
he scattered them and filled the earth with their tribes.
Had he not had mercy on the ignorant ones and scattered them,
they would have suffocated in their multitude in the land of Babel.
How many of all these peoples could have fit into a single plain?

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How much of the endless creation could have inhabited a single place?
All of these towns and cities that fill the world,
the ignorant ones sought to collect them into a single town.
Had the Lord not had mercy on them and scattered them,
how and to what extent would the place that they possessed have been sufficient for them?
He confused them, and it seems to have been punishment,
though the deed was in reality full of mercy for the entire world.
The regions would not have been inhabited on their own accord,
nor would the cities have been built by themselves,
nor would territories have been designated in the lands,
nor would the earth even have been cultivated by humanity.
Babel, so to speak, would have alone been settled,
and all of the world would have remained devoid of inhabitants.
That idea was opposed to the cultivation of earth,
for had the deed of the foolish not ceased, they would have suffocated.
Mercy went out and scattered them throughout the lands,
and while each one was angry at another, they filled the earth.
O angry ones who cultivated the entire world,
for while fighting with one another, the desolate earth became inhabited.

XIII. RECAPITULATION OF GOD'S MERCY IN THE FORM OF DISCIPLINE

The Compassionate One is amazing with regard to how merciful he is to his creations,
for even while disciplining, he truly sustains the one whom he strikes.
Who would flee from his merciful discipline?

...
...
...

For, that Disciplinary is full of wisdom in all of his deeds.
Had he not disciplined the children of Babel, there would have been real discipline,
but by disciplining them, he actually delivered them from discipline.
By the fact that he disciplined them, he showed how beneficial his compassion was,
for through his discipline, peace was obtained for the earth.
The Wise of Heart placed division in their languages, Job 9:4
and for that reason, he scattered them throughout the lands.
They gave evil counsel to one another at the beginning,
and therefore, he divided their languages, one against another.
He confused them so that this one would not understand that one,
for this was grace that he enacted in them.
He wanted to subdue their wild thoughts,
and he placed a halter on their tongues and restrained them.
Since one could not understand the language of another,
he left him and went away, and there came relief so they were no longer bothered.
The mercy of the Lord appeared among their tribes
and relieved those who were afflicted by their deeds.
The foolish ones who bitterly struck themselves,
he removed them from being struck as he was striking.
He overthrew them and raised up those who were overthrown;
he scattered and gave rest to those who were oppressed.
If someone hears him as if threatening about this deed,
he thinks that God was filled with anger concerning the presumptuous ones.

ܘܐܡܪ ܠܗ ܝܫܘܥ ܐܠܐ ܡܛܠ ܕܐܢܫ ܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܠܡܐܡܪ ܠܗ ܗܠܝ ܐܢܐ ܐܡܪ ܠܟ ܠܐ ܥܕ ܫܒܥ ܙܒܢܝ ܐܠܐ ܥܕ ܫܒܥܝܢ ܙܒܢܝ ܫܒܥ ܙܒܢܝ ܫܒܥܝܢ ܙܒܢܝ ܐܬ ܐܢܬ ܩܪܝ ܠܝ ܒܪ ܐܢܫ ܐܡܪ ܠܗ ܐܠܗܝ ܐܢܐ ܠܐ ܩܪܝܬ ܠܟ ܫܒܥ ܙܒܢܝ ܐܠܐ ܥܕ ܫܒܥ

'Come, let us descend' and because they planned to do this Gen 11:7
'then nothing that they plan will be deprived from them'. Gen 11:6
This was a threat; but upon further inquiry, it was great love;
As for the anger in his voice, in reality, he enacted grace.
If you hear him as if threatening, 'Come, let us descend', Gen 11:7
you think that he bore fire that he might consume them.
If you consider the judgment that he brought forth on them,
you find that it was a gift of great riches.
If you hear that (phrase) 'Let us divide their languages', Gen 11:7
it sounds as if he threatened enemies.
But, if you see how he divided and settled them,
you understand that he provided for them as for sons.
As if for heirs, he divided the lands for them,
and a good deed sprang forth from his threat.
What came to pass in judgment was a blessing,
for instead of a people, he settled them as different peoples.
He did this even for Abraham, when he blessed him:
'your name will be called father of peoples, and not of a people'. Gen 17:5
This which Abraham received as a gift
was given in judgment to those who rebelled.
It appears that even his blow is filled with medicine.
Blessed is the Compassionate One for he is entirely mercy to his creation.

Completed is the (*mimro*) on the division of languages and the tower. 548 verses.[33]

[33] The *mimro*, as persevered, actually has 550 verses.

וְאֶת־כָּל־הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה הָרֹמֶשֶׁת עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃
לֹא תֹאכְלוּ כָּל־נְבֵלָה לַגֵּר־אֲשֶׁר־בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ תִּתְּנֶנָּה וְאָכָל
וְנָתוֹן לְנָכְרִי כִּי עַם קָדוֹשׁ אַתָּה לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא־תְבַשֵּׁל
גְּדִי בַּחֲלֵב אִמּוֹ׃ עַשֵּׂר תְּעַשֵּׂר אֶת־כָּל־תְּבוּאַת זַרְעֶךָ
הַיֹּצֵא הַשָּׂדֶה שָׁנָה שָׁנָה׃ וְאָכַלְתָּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחַר לְשַׁכֵּן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם מַעְשַׂר דְּגָנְךָ תִּירֹשְׁךָ
וְיִצְהָרֶךָ וּבְכֹרוֹת בְּקָרְךָ וְצֹאנֶךָ לְמַעַן תִּלְמַד לְיִרְאָה
אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כָּל־הַיָּמִים׃ וְכִי־יִרְבֶּה מִמְּךָ הַדֶּרֶךְ
כִּי לֹא תוּכַל שְׂאֵתוֹ כִּי־יִרְחַק מִמְּךָ הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לָשׂוּם שְׁמוֹ שָׁם כִּי־בֵרַכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ׃
וְנָתַתָּה בַכָּסֶף וְצַרְתָּ הַכֶּסֶף בְּיָדֶךָ וְהָלַכְתָּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם
אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בּוֹ׃ וְנָתַתָּה הַכֶּסֶף בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר
תְּאַוֶּה נַפְשְׁךָ בַּבָּקָר וּבַצֹּאן וּבַיַּיִן וּבַשֵּׁכָר וּבְכֹל אֲשֶׁר
תִּשְׁאָלְךָ נַפְשֶׁךָ וְאָכַלְתָּ שָׁם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשָׂמַחְתָּ
אַתָּה וּבֵיתֶךָ׃ וְהַלֵּוִי אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ לֹא תַעַזְבֶנּוּ כִּי אֵין
לוֹ חֵלֶק וְנַחֲלָה אִתָּךְ׃ מִקְצֵה שָׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים תּוֹצִיא אֶת־כָּל־
מַעְשַׂר תְּבוּאָתְךָ בַּשָּׁנָה הַהִוא וְהִנַּחְתָּ בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ׃ וּבָא
הַלֵּוִי כִּי אֵין לוֹ חֵלֶק וְנַחֲלָה אִתָּךְ וְהַגֵּר וְהַיָּתוֹם וְהָאַלְמָנָה
אֲשֶׁר בִּשְׁעָרֶיךָ וְאָכְלוּ וְשָׂבָעוּ לְמַעַן יְבָרֶכְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ
בְּכֹל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדְךָ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה׃

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